

Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

courage is contagious

Viewing cable 99HONGKONG8575, PROMINENT HK JOURNALIST: CHINA'S ARMY WANTS

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#99HONGKONG8575**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
99HONGKONG8575	1999-09-24 10:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Consulate Hong Kong

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.aftenposten.no/spesial/wikileaksdokumenter/article3994303.ece>

R 241001Z SEP 99
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0535
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
AMCONSUL SHANGHAI
AMCONSUL SHENYANG
AIT TAIPEI 5225
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL CHENGDU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 008575

E.O. 12958: DECL:09/24/09
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [HK](#) [TW](#) [US](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: PROMINENT HK JOURNALIST: CHINA'S ARMY WANTS
A FIGHT, HU JINTAO'S FUTURE MURKY
(U) CLASSIFIED BY E/P CHIEF LISA KUBISKE. REASON 1.5
(B).

SUMMARY

11. (C) LONG-TIME CHINA REPORTER XXXXXXXXXXXXX

RECENTLY DESCRIBED AN INSULAR CHINESE MILITARY LEADERSHIP THAT INCREASINGLY HAS LOOKED TO LIMITED ARMED CONFLICT WITH TAIWAN AS A MEANS TO RESTORING THE ARMY'S PRESTIGE. HE ADDED THAT VICE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO WAS OUT OF FAVOR WITH PRESIDENT JIANG ZEMIN BECAUSE OF HIS POOR HANDLING OF THE ACCIDENTAL BOMBING OF THE CHINESE EMBASSY IN BELGRADE AND BY HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH A YOUNG WOMAN. JIANG, XXXXXXXXXXXX SAID, HAD CONSEQUENTLY JUDGED HU UNWORTHY OF SUCCEEDING HIM AS CHINA'S TOP LEADER. XXXXXXXXXXXX ALSO ASSERTED THAT JIANG ZEMIN HAS PROTECTED THE CAREER OF DING GUANGEN AND OTHER FORMER MEMBERS OF DENG XIAOPING'S OFFICE IN THE HOPE OF ENJOYING SIMILAR TREATMENT FOR JIANG'S PROTEGES FOLLOWING HIS DEPARTURE. THE DISCUSSION ALSO SHED SOME LIGHT ON XXXXXXXXXXXX'S ADMITTEDLY SPOTTY TRACK RECORD READING THE TEA LEAVES IN BEIJING. HE NOTED THAT HIS SOURCES AT TIMES HAVE FED HIM STORIES DESIGNED TO SPIN MORE THAN INFORM. XXXXXXXXXXXX COMPLAINED, MOREOVER, OF HIS INABILITY TO CONFIRM OR DENY A STORY WITH BEIJING AUTHORITIES BEFORE GOING TO PRESS. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) A FREE-WHEELING LUNCH DISCUSSION ON SEPTEMBER 14 WITH XXXXXXXXXXXX PROVIDED SOME DETAIL LACKING IN XXXXXXXXXXXX'S RECENT REPORTING ON CHINESE POLITICS. WHEN ASKED ABOUT RECENT PRESS REPORTS OF HIGH-RANKING PLA OFFICERS SPYING FOR TAIWAN, XXXXXXXXXXXX SAID HIS SOURCES HAVE TOLD HIM MANY OFFICERS INCREASINGLY HAVE SEEN SOME FORM OF LIMITED MILITARY ACTION AGAINST TAIWAN AS AN ATTRACTIVE SOLUTION TO THE ARMY'S SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STREAM OF PUBLIC HUMILIATION. ACCORDING TO XXXXXXXXXXXX'S SOURCES, THE ARMY MIGHT ATTACK ONE OF THE TAIWAN-HELD ISLANDS IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT THEN WITHDRAW. XXXXXXXXXXXX SAYS OFFICERS WHO FAVOR SUCH ACTION HAVE SAID AN ATTACK WOULD RESTORE THE ARMY'S TARNISHED IMAGE AND LEGITIMACY, YIELD INCREASED MILITARY FUNDING, AND LEAD TO PROMOTIONS FOR OFFICERS WHO HAVE NOT SEEN COMBAT SINCE THE BORDER SKIRMISHES WITH VIETNAM IN THE 1980S. WHEN POLOFFS REMARKED THAT ANY SUCH MOVE WOULD BE DISASTROUS FOR CHINA, XXXXXXXXXXXX SAID THAT HIS CONTACTS HAVE TOLD HIM THAT MANY OFFICERS FROM THE TOP TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CHAIN OF COMMAND WERE ILL-INFORMED ABOUT INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND EITHER DID NOT UNDERSTAND OR DID NOT CARE ABOUT THE FOREIGN POLICY OR ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR ACTIONS. XXXXXXXXXXXX SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE ARMY COULD NOT DECIDE TO GO TO WAR WITHOUT CIVILIAN APPROVAL. IN ANY EVENT, HE SAID, CHINA WOULD NOT ATTACK IF TAIWAN PRESIDENT LEE TENG-HUI'S SUCCESSOR IN ELECTIONS NEXT MARCH TOOK A LOW-KEY APPROACH TO LEE'S "TWO STATES THEORY"; A RETRACTION WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY. THE ARMY WOULD BE WATCHING AND WAITING UNTIL THEN.

LEADERSHIP TIDBITS

14. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX FREQUENTLY PEPPERED THE CONVERSATION WITH INFORMATION HE HAS KEPT OUT OF PRINT. FOR EXAMPLE, HE DECLARED WITHOUT PROMPTING THAT VICE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO HAD SCANDALIZED JIANG ZEMIN BY CARRYING ON A RELATIONSHIP WITH A CHINESE CENTRAL TELEVISION NEWS ANCHORWOMAN IN HER TWENTIES -- YOUNGER THAN HU'S OWN DAUGHTER. XXXXXXXXXXXX CITED THIS AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHY JIANG HAD DECIDED THAT HU "DEFINITELY" WOULD NOT SUCCEED HIM AS THE "CORE" OF THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHINESE LEADERS. HE ADDED WITHOUT ELABORATION THAT, BASED ON HU'S HANDLING OF THE ACCIDENTAL BOMBING OF CHINA'S BELGRADE EMBASSY, JIANG NOW BELIEVED THE VICE PRESIDENT WAS TOO WEAK TO SUCCEED HIM. THUS, JIANG WOULD STAY ON FOR ANOTHER TERM, OR STEP DOWN BUT REMAIN IN CONTROL WITH PLIANT FIGUREHEADS HOLDING THE FORMAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS. (COMMENT: THIS LINE PROVIDED A TIDY WAY FOR XXXXXXXXXXXX TO COVER HIMSELF WHEN HU WAS NAMED CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION VICE CHAIRMAN ON SEPTEMBER 22. END COMMENT.) IN PRINT THE NEXT DAY, THIS TIME CITING A "DIPLOMATIC SOURCE," XXXXXXXXXXXX BRIEFLY REFERRED TO A SCANDAL INVOLVING AN UNNAMED "FOURTH

GENERATION LEADER" AND HIS TELEVISION NEWSCASTER
MISTRESS BUT LEFT OUT THE REST OF THE DETAILS.

15. (C) AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF XXXXXXXXXXXXX'S UNPROMPTED
ASSERTIONS, HE SAID THAT JIANG ZEMIN WAS A BUDDHIST,
THOUGH AN "UNORTHODOX" ONE. XXXXXXXXXXXXX CLAIMED ONE OF HIS
BEIJING SOURCES TOLD HIM THAT LAST LUNAR NEW YEAR
JIANG GOT UP AT THREE IN THE MORNING AND DROVE TWO
HOURS OUT OF BEIJING TO ATTEND A BUDDHIST CEREMONY AT
AN UNNAMED TEMPLE. HE ADDED THAT JIANG WENT TO VISIT
DAOIST SAGES AT "WUDAN MOUNTAIN" FOLLOWING THE
ACCIDENTAL BOMBING IN BELGRADE AND SPENT AN HOUR
DISCUSSING "MATTERS OF STATE" WITH A DAOIST PRIEST.
(COMMENT: THOUGH HE DID NOT SAY SO, PERHAPS XXXXXXXXXXXXX WAS
DESCRIBING WHAT HE SEES AS JIANG'S POTENTIAL
VULNERABILITY IN THE PARTY'S ONGOING CRACKDOWN ON
SPIRITUAL PRACTICES. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXX ALSO STATED UNEQUIVOCALLY, BEFORE WRITING
ABOUT RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, THAT PROPAGANDA CHIEF
DING GUANGEN WOULD STAY IN HIS POST. XXXXXXXXXXXXX SAID HIS
SOURCES MADE CLEAR THAT DING WAS HATED "BY EVERYONE"
IN BEIJING BUT THAT JIANG WOULD PROTECT DING ON THE
ADVICE OF HIS MENTOR WANG DAOHAN. ACCORDING TO XXXXXXXXXXXXX,
WANG WARNED THAT DING -- LIKE CMC MEMBER WANG RUILIN -
- WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF DENG XIAOPING'S STAFF AND
THEREFORE MUST BE PROTECTED IF JIANG WANTED THE SAME
CONSIDERATION TO BE GIVEN TO HIS PROTEGES ONCE HE
RETIRES.

UNRELIABLE SOURCES

17. (C) IN ANSWERING POLOFFS' QUESTIONS ABOUT
DEADLINES AND PRESS TIMES IN HONG KONG, XXXXXXXXXXXXX COMMENTED
THAT HIS STORIES DON'T PAN OUT AT TIMES BECAUSE HIS
SOURCES SOMETIMES FLOAT STORIES AS TRIAL BALLOONS OR
TO SATISFY SOME OTHER AGENDA. GIVEN XXXXXXXXXXXXX'S TIGHT
DEADLINE AND HIS INABILITY TO CONTACT CHINESE
OFFICIALS DIRECTLY TO CONFIRM STORIES, HE SAID HE CAN
BE WRONG SOMETIMES.

COMMENT

18. (C) POLOFFS FOUND XXXXXXXXXXXXX TO BE A CAGEY BUT TALKATIVE
INTERLOCUTOR WHO APPEARS GENUINE IN HIS DESIRE TO TELL
A GOOD NEWS STORY; HIS IS NO "DRUDGE REPORT." BUT HIS
REPORTING DOES NOT APPEAR TO MEET U.S. JOURNALISTIC
STANDARDS OF SOURCING EITHER, AND SHOULD BE READ WITH
THAT IN MIND. MOREOVER, XXXXXXXXXXXXX REPORTS FROM A PLACE
WHERE STORIES CAN TAKE ON A LIFE OF THEIR OWN, AND
WHERE IT CAN BE HARD TO DISTINGUISH CORROBORATION FROM
REPETITION OF THE SAME RUMOR OR OUTRIGHT SPIN. FOR
EXAMPLE, IN A SEPARATE MEETING LAST WEEK WITH POLOFF,
XXXXXXXXXXXX -- ECHOED XXXXXXXXXXXXX'S
RECENTLY PUBLISHED STORIES ABOUT PREMIER ZHU RONGJI'S
DECLINING POWER. XXXXXXXXXXXXX SAID HE HAD EVEN HEARD NEW RUMORS
THAT ZHU MAY STEP DOWN AFTER THE OCTOBER 1 NATIONAL
DAY CELEBRATIONS. XXXXXXXXXXXXX ATTRIBUTED ZHU'S SUPPOSED FALL
TO HIS "TOO SOFT" APPROACH IN DEALING WITH THE
FALUNGONG MOVEMENT. POLOFFS SUSPECT THAT XXXXXXXXXXXXX'S LINE
WAS INTENDED TO BOLSTER HIS PLEAS FOR THE UNITED
STATES TO "DO MORE" TO HELP IMPROVE SINO-U.S.
RELATIONS -- LIKE DEEMPHASIZING CHINA'S HUMAN RIGHTS
RECORD -- LEST REFORMERS LIKE ZHU PAY THE PRICE FOR
APPEARING WEAK IN DEALING WITH THE UNITED STATES.
SOME OF XXXXXXXXXXXXX'S BEIJING SOURCES MAY HAVE TOLD HIM
SIMILAR STORIES ABOUT ZHU AND HU JINTAO TO FURTHER THE
SAME AGENDA. END COMMENT.

KLOSSON